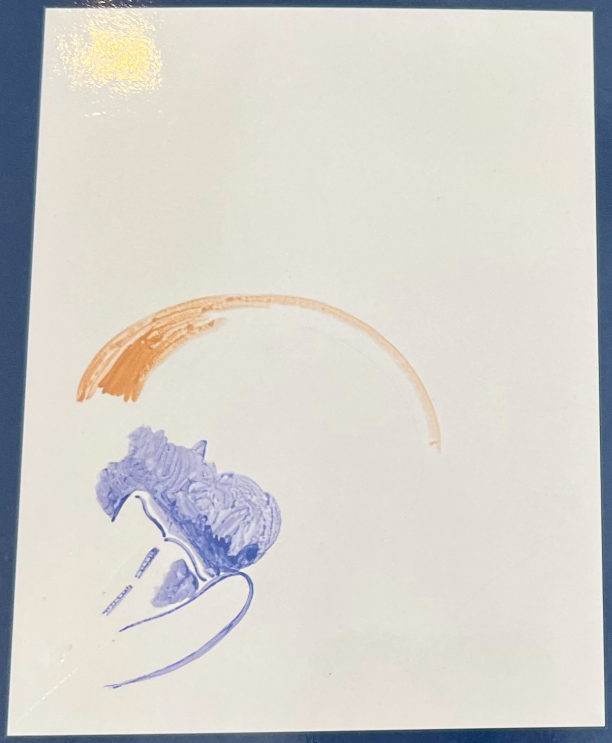
Michael Sanchez

Michael Krebber
Catalogue Raisonné



Volume 1

1954 Michael Krebber is born in Cologne to Mechthild Abeler and Karl-Heinz Hargesheimer, the photographer known as Chargesheimer. After his mother's remarriage, he is adopted by Günter Krebber, a teacher of French literature, a principal, and a journalist.

1966 Krebber studies art with Hans Salentin at the Schiller-Gymnasium and takes private flute lessons with Caecilie Lamerichs. In 1970, he meets the artist Michael Buthe, who introduces him to the work of Sigmar Polke.

1975 He attends the class of Markus Lüpertz at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Karlsruhe, where he stays until 1977. He spends his last semester studying with Georg Baselitz.

1978 In August, Krebber works as the assistant to Baselitz at Schloss Derneburg near Hannover, before moving to Berlin in July 1979.

1980 His work is exhibited for the first time in *Aktion Pisskrücke: Geheimdienst am Nächsten*, organized by Werner Büttner, Uwe Gabriel, and Albert Oehlen at the Künstlerhaus Weidenallee in Hamburg.

1981 Krebber turns toward theater, participating in the Stimme und Bewegung group, led by Vladimir and Cornelia Rodzianko in Berlin. He moves back to Cologne in 1984.

1986 He holds his first solo painting exhibition in January at Fettstrasse 7a, an exhibition space organized by Martin Kippenberger and Oehlen. Beginning in October, Krebber assists Kippenberger for approximately one year. Through Kippenberger, he meets Cosima von Bonin, whom he would marry in 1992.

1987 Krebber's exhibitions in the late 1980s follow a tendency known as "context art."

1990 In June, Krebber holds his first exhibition with Galerie Christian Nagel in Cologne, where he would show regularly throughout the decade. In July, he exhibits his first painting since 1986, a work he made in 1978 while working for Baselitz.

1991 Krebber produces his first new paintings since the Fettstrasse 7a exhibition five years earlier. These works are shown in his exhibition titled *biche dans un sous-bois* at the new location of Fettstrasse 7a in Zurich.

1993 His first solo exhibition in the United States opens at Luhring Augustine in New York.

1994 Around 1994, von Bonin befriended Kai Althoff, Justus Köhncke, and many others. This triggered decisive changes in Krebber's social environment and broadened his viewpoint.

1997 He holds his first solo exhibition with Galerie Daniel Buchholz in Cologne and his first solo institutional exhibition at the Villa Arson in Nice.

2000 Krebber's retrospective, *Apothekerman*, opens at the Kunstverein Braunschweig and the Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg.

ERGO DUMM

Introduction

A catalogue raisonné's typical purpose is to allow a reader to trace the development of an artist's oeuvre, from beginnings to maturity to a late style. Michael Krebber's work, however, obeys a more involuted temporality. Rather than progressing in a linear fashion, his practice unfolds through concatenations of delay and repetition. Milestones that should occur at certain times – for instance, a first solo exhibition – are deferred. And when they do transpire, they tend to restage earlier moments in the artist's development.

Beginning his artistic life with an exaggerated deferral of the act of painting, Krebber makes delay itself into the content of his work. Despite the seriousness of his engagement with the medium of painting, and his committed participation in the most influential artistic groups in Germany during the 1980s, he did not exhibit a painting until nearly ten years after finishing his studies in 1977. During this time, he largely abandoned artistic production in favor of studying theater. After finally showing his first canvas, in 1986, Krebber did not exhibit a second for another four years, reiterating the delay with which he had begun. Only at the turn of the 1990s did he establish the consistent painting practice that continues to this day.

Krebber described these delays using a concept that he called the "spacer."[1] The "spacer" is a device that enables the artist to distance himself from his own development – and thereby to observe the process of identity-formation itself.[2] Krebber did not become a professional painter by asserting his own artistic identity, but by presenting himself, in the words of fellow artist Michaela Eichwald, as an "eternal student."[3] When he showed his second painting in 1990, it was not a new canvas but one from 1978, which he had painted in the style of Georg Baselitz, one of his teachers. His work, as he put it, is a "monument of repetition" – a term that, for him, also means "rehearsal."[4] Restaging the rehearsal as the performance, Krebber repeats repetition. He perpetually dissolves himself by reiterating, in a recursive fashion, the experience of constituting himself.[5]

Focusing on the period contained within this first volume of the catalogue raisonné, which includes the artist's work in all media from 1972 to 2000, the present essay traces the biographical origins of his iterative approach. To establish the art historical significance of Krebber's practice, this introduction positions him as a countermodel to contemporaries like Martin Kippenberger and Albert Oehlen who, in the mid-1980s, operated from precisely the mature positions that Krebber refused. He effected this refusal through the practice of what he later called "puberty in painting."[6] It is a stance that values the transition over the destination and the process of becoming a painter over the fact of being one.

1. Youth

Krebber's artistic debut came late. Prior to his first solo exhibition, at the age of thirty-two, Krebber had been an observer of art more than a participant in it. "I shilly-shallied and delayed my entrance into the art world for years," he recalled.[7] But Krebber was also precocious: at fifteen, he made the decision to become an artist.[8] Indeed, it was during adolescence that he established the aesthetic value system that he would retain throughout his life. This development was due, in large part, to three early influences. Hans Salentin, a sculptor with ties to the Zero group who taught at the Schiller-Gymnasium, his high school, introduced him to the work of Piero Manzoni.[9] Caecilie Lamerichs, his flute instructor, exposed him to Paul Klee and Wols. And the artist Michael Buthe, whom Krebber befriended at the beginning of the 1970s, introduced him to the work of Sigmar Polke. But while he "knew everything that was relevant at the time," he recalled, and sincerely wished to be an artist himself, Krebber did not yet know how to do so.[10] He would only achieve this goal much later by realizing, along the way, that seeking to be an artist was enough.

In the early 1970s, Krebber – who would turn twenty in 1974 – gravitated to the artists who showed with Galerie Michael Werner in Cologne, particularly Polke, Marcel Broodthaers, Antonius Höckelmann, and James Lee Byars. Werner's gallery embodied the ideals to which Krebber aspired: the "Michael Werner world" was, for Krebber, "something like a religious order."[11] A "pious boy," as he described himself, he visited a 1970 exhibition of Polke drawings at Galerie Thomas Borgmann nearly every day that it was on view.[12] The formal lessons he learned from these artists stayed with him throughout his life: watching Höckelmann working on a massive drawing in Michael Werner and Jule Lüpertz's apartment "was the first time," he recalled, "that I saw or experienced

that one could *manipulate* something."[13] In September 1972, he made a group of drawings in a style that combined French art deco illustration with Polke's work of the late 1960s. When he worked up the courage to show this portfolio to Polke, however, Krebber did not receive a positive response: the elder artist expressed no interest, and flatly said "well done."[14]

Krebber's delayed maturation was due, at least in part, to what he described as a "problem of education."[15] In 1974, he moved to Hamburg on the recommendation of Polke and the psychologist and writer Friedrich W. Heubach, who gave him the telephone number of the artists Ernst Mitzka and Rebecca Horn.[16] Since Polke was on leave at the time from teaching at the Hochschule für bildende Künste in Hamburg, Krebber called Markus Lüpertz, another artist who showed with Michael Werner, to apply to study with him at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Karlsruhe. But because he had missed the deadline by one day, he decided to stay in Hamburg for the rest of the year, studying Mitzka's bookshelf and attending his lecture series at the academy. Mitzka also took Krebber to Berlin to see the writer and cognitive scientist Oswald Wiener and the artist Günter Brus in person at Exil, a restaurant that Wiener ran with Ingrid Wiener and Michel Würthle. Krebber's studies thus began with a missed encounter and a delay, creating a problematic structure that would prove to be foundational for him.

The following year, Krebber was accepted to study in Karlsruhe under Lüpertz. Although Lüpertz's conservative pedagogy initially appealed to Krebber, he did not thrive in this environment and failed to gain his teacher's approval. "My art studies," he recalled, "were marked by continual attempts at acts of force, like trying to force myself to write with the hand that one cannot write with."[17] For evidence one might examine the painting in a 1976 photograph of Krebber at the academy (see p. 12). In this photograph, he stands in front of his easel with the phrase "ergo dumm" (a joke on Descartes's "cogito ergo sum" from the artist Dieter Roth) written on the classroom wall.[18] Next to him, out of the frame, is a tabletop arrangement of objects including a stuffed pheasant, which Lüpertz had lent him together with a human skull to embellish the still life that Krebber had set up as a model. But Krebber's painting bears no resemblance to its ostensible subject. The act of forcing himself to paint in Lüpertz's style of the time led to an awkward result, as if Krebber had indeed made the work using his less dominant hand. "The whole thing wasn't working and wasn't going anywhere," he later recalled.[19]

In 1978, with Lüpertz's support, Krebber went to work as the assistant to Baselitz.[20] While staying at his castle in Derneburg, near Hannover, Krebber had an experience diametrically opposed to his studies with Lüpertz. Baselitz informed Krebber that, like him, he had been untalented in school, and that talent was an impediment to becoming an artist. Encouraging him in a way that his previous teacher had not, Baselitz became a model for Krebber. During his year in Derneburg, Krebber worked on five large-format paintings of upside-down figures in the manner of the older artist. This tendency to absorb styles from others – or, to put it more strongly, to embody them – was already apparent in his early copies of Polke drawings and remains a central feature of Krebber's practice to this day.[21] So was his perfectionism: "he wanted to make paintings, and occasionally he tried," Baselitz has written of Krebber, "but his opinion of them, and of painting in general, was so uncompromising and elitist that each picture had to be the ultimate one."[22] Indeed, because he was unable to complete most of these paintings to his satisfaction, Krebber kept only the first of them (cat. no. 2).

After finishing his work for Baselitz, Krebber moved to West Berlin. He spent the remainder of his inheritance from his biological father, the well-known postwar photographer Chargesheimer, on the lease for a spacious loft studio there.[23] When Krebber arrived in the city, *Neue Wilde* painting was on the rise. According to Wolfgang Becker, the critic who coined the term, this new tendency was, in contrast to the art of the previous decade, based on "expression," "spontaneity," and "emotion."[24] His studies with Lüpertz and Baselitz, two forerunners of the movement, should have perfectly prepared him to take part in this revival of painting. But Krebber produced no paintings in his new studio.[25] After about a year, he took all his paints to a flea market and sold his leftover stretchers to Lüpertz. Renouncing his aspirations to be a painter, Krebber abandoned his collection of catalogues by Baselitz, Joseph Beuys, Lüpertz, and Polke in various locations across the city, such as a men's bathroom, a bus, a park, and a bar.[26]

As the performative quality of this rejection implies, Krebber's turn away from painting was coextensive with a turn toward theater. In March 1980, he visited his friend Uwe Gabriel in Hamburg, who had invited him to take part in a concert of two saxophones on the occasion of *Aktion Pisskrücke: Geheimdienst am Nächsten. 2. ausserordentliche Veranstaltung in Bild und Ton* (Piss Crutch Action: Secret Service for Thy Neighbor. 2nd Extraordinary Presentation in Images and Sounds),

an exhibition that he was organizing with Werner Büttner and Oehlen at the Künstlerhaus Weidenallee in Hamburg.[27] During a meeting in Gabriel's garden, Büttner took a photograph of Krebber holding a saw with Oehlen behind a barred window (cat. no. 232). At Krebber's suggestion, Oehlen and Krebber went on to make a series of twenty-eight photographic tableaux featuring the two artists in the roles of gardeners, holding props such as shovels and pickaxes. (In one scene, they actually dig up a large tree). Satisfied with how these had turned out, the artists decided to include them in the exhibition.

Krebber and Oehlen presented themselves here as what Büttner, Oehlen, and Georg Herold called "specialized workers" (*Facharbeiter*).[28] The concept of the artist as a "specialized worker" would be central to a collaborative 1982 text by Büttner, Oehlen, and Herold called "Facharbeiterficken" (Specialized Worker Fuck), in which the artists analogized the process of becoming a professional painter with the ability to "fuck art."[29] To be able to work as a painter was, for them, coextensive with passage into adulthood: Martin Kippenberger, who had met these artists when he was studying in Hamburg in the previous decade, titled his first institutional catalogue *Durch die Pubertät zum Erfolg* (Through Puberty to Success, 1981).[30] Oehlen, similarly, had staged his move from Berlin to Hamburg in 1977 as a half-serious act of maturation: in this new city, he vowed to find a "steady job, a steady house, and a steady girlfriend," the three stereotypical tenets of adult male life.[31] Such gestures did not interest Krebber, for whom puberty itself would remain essential.

Krebber and Oehlen's photographs seem to document an initiation. Drawing on the sadomasochistic trops typical of punk – which reached Germany the same year that Oehlen arrived in Hamburg – the *Aktion Pisskrücke* photographs present Krebber in the role of initiate.[32] In several images, he stands at the top of a ladder perched next to a water basin, wearing a full-leather ensemble that he had purchased the day before in a motorcycle shop on the Reeperbahn. His pants pulled down, Krebber holds out a shovel and a stick from his waist, each with a boot suspended from its end by a string. The stick protruding from his front resembles an erection; the other, on his buttocks, suggests penetration. In another scene, Krebber's feet stick up from the basin, as if he had been flushed head first into it. In yet another, he stands on all fours like a dog. Next to him is a sign, in his handwriting, that reads: "Er will nicht weiter!!!" (He doesn't want to go on!!!).

The initiation, however, proved unsuccessful, and Krebber sent back the catalogues and publications, including early issues of his zine *Dum Dum*, that Oehlen had given to him. Turning instead toward the artist Mike Hentz, whom he took to be a more radical example of the punk attitude, Krebber sought out situations in which such mistreatment was lived rather than staged. Together with his girlfriend at the time, the filmmaker Bärbel Freund, he participated in a series of three actions organized by the performance group Minus Delta t, led by Karel Dudesek, Hentz, and Bernhard Müller.[33] Titled *Rotation*, these actions took place in Rotterdan, Utrecht, and Breda in November 1980. In Rotterdam, the members of Minus Delta t had a violent conflict with another group performing in the same space. With his buzzed hair and military training suit, Krebber was targeted because he resembled a German skinhead.[34] Hentz and Dudesek subjected themselves and those traveling with them to extreme conditions. In Utrecht, for example, everyone slept on lumps of coal spread across the floor. After four hours of sleep, a group-building feedback session was held in which each person was expected to say, in front of a video recorder, what they thought of each other person in the room.[35]

By the end of 1980, Krebber had decided to "stop making art."[36] "I seriously wanted to become an actor," he recalled.[37] After their tour with Minus Delta t, Freund and Krebber, at the former's instigation, participated in several theater workshops in Berlin. One was based on the method-acting technique developed by Lee Strasberg; one on the Polish director Jerzy Grotowski's notion of "poor theater"; and one was called Stimme und Bewegung (Voice and Movement).[38] The last of these, led by Vladimir and Cornelia Rodzianko, exercised a particularly strong influence on Krebber at the time. The Rodziankos had originally developed their training method to allow dancers to sing, thereby circumventing the problem of contraction.[39] Cornelia Rodzianko was one of the last students of the expressionist dancer Mary Wigman, and Vladimir Rodzianko had worked with Igor Stravinsky. In their workshops, the Rodziankos combined vocal training, physical training, and improvisation.[40] In one the group's plays, a vaudeville-style revue titled *Plastik und Reis* (Plastic and Rice, c. 1982), Krebber delivered speeches from a styrofoam podium in the role of different politicians, from Adolf Hitler to Helmut Kohl.[41] In another Stimme und Bewegung production, which was planned but never performed, Krebber was slated to paint the ceiling of a church in the role of Michelangelo painting the Sistine Chapel.

Combining their experiences with Minus Delta t and Stimme und Bewegung, Freund and Krebber, in 1981, made *Grützefilm* (Jellyfilm, cat. no. 238). This short film, influenced by Marie Menken's 1965 documentary on Andy Warhol's Factory, begins with the artists cooking green and red jelly in a bathtub, which they proceed to transport in a Volkswagen bus to a cold storage facility to gel.[42] After bringing the tub back to the film studio, which they had covered in a plastic tarp, Freund and another actor take baths in the jelly and drop pieces of it onto mirrors. (These recall the mirrors that Krebber and Oehlen integrated, at the former's suggestion, into the *Aktion Pisskrücke* photographs.) At the end of the film, all three actors clean up the jelly with a broom. Even when not painting, Krebber performed as a painter: the colored jelly is like paint, the broom like a brush, and the tarp like a canvas.

In the first text written on Krebber's work, Oehlen – who Krebber met again in Cologne several years later – described him as a "criticism junkie" who submitted himself and others to unsparing judgment as a mechanism to defer his own artistic production (and, implicitly, his maturation as well).[43] Oehlen framed Krebber's incapacity to exhibit or even consistently make paintings from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s as a deliberate act of "staging his own failure."[44] This had not been Krebber's intent; his lack of productivity during these years had been, as he put it, merely "passive."[45] In rewriting this narrative, Oehlen transformed what Krebber considered to be a "great weakness" into an "achievement."[46] His lack of work had become a work: Krebber had "done something," as he put it, "by doing nothing."[47]

2. Puberty

When he moved back to Cologne in 1984, Krebber immediately crossed paths again with Büttner, Kippenberger, and Oehlen, who were now showing with Galerie Max Hetzler there.[48] Since their time in Hamburg, this trio of artists had coalesced into a group that Diedrich Diederichsen, a critic with close ties to them, compared to a left-authoritarian political party.[49] Prefigured by their self-presentation as "specialized workers," the Hetzler group – as it was commonly called at the time – was governed by a strict code of conduct, which Diederichsen described as "virtual Maoism."[50] This ideology, influenced by Oehlen's early participation in a communist youth group in Krefeld, is set forth most clearly in the artists' 1984 book *Wahrheit ist Arbeit* (Truth is Work), which they dedicated to Krebber.[51]

As they explain in *Wahrheit ist Arbeit,* these artists conceived painting as a tool in a social "experiment."[52] Inspired by the historian of science Karl Popper's *Logik der Forschung* (The Logic of Scientific Discovery), these artists approached viewers as "test subjects" who, by seeing their work, would undergo a process of hazing.[53] Büttner, Kippenberger, and Oehlen compared their viewers to boy scouts forced to bite into a tree in order to see which is stronger – an idea they claim to derive from a quote by Mao Tse-Tung.[54] If a viewer can "take it" – in the words of the artist and writer Jutta Koether, a key early observer – then that viewer was granted entry into the group.[55] For Büttner, Kippenberger, and Oehlen, painting was political inasmuch as it defined conditions of social inclusion and exclusion. Indeed, the follow-up exhibition to *Wahrheit ist Arbeit* was titled *Malen ist Wahlen,* or "Painting is Electing": each exhibition, for them, became an occasion to "elect" new members of the party.[56]

Krebber took a number of notes analyzing his experience in these artists' milieu, which he later incorporated into a 1987 sculpture shown at his solo exhibition *Panama: Zeichnungen und Objekte* (Panama: Drawings and Objects) at Galerie Bleich-Rossi in Graz (cat. no. 257). In one of these, Krebber compared attending openings at Hetzler's gallery to taking "business trips."[57] To prepare, he practiced "test sentences in front of a mirror" which he would then repeat, like an actor, at the event.[58] The purpose of this "training," as he put it, was to desensitize himself to the treatment that he was about to receive.[59] (He wrote that he did not want to be either "receptive to praise" or receptive "to being insulted.")[60] Presiding over each opening, and administering such "insults," was the "master in the house" who Krebber called a "situation leader."[61] These "situation leaders" – particularly, in Krebber's experience, the artist Günther Förg – subjected him to "every insult."[62] In one instance, Förg put his leg on the table in the direction of Krebber's mouth and said "lick my sole."[63]

In early 1986, Krebber finally held his first solo exhibition as a painter. The instigation to exhibit his work did not come from the artist himself, but from Oehlen and Kippenberger.[64] Oehlen arranged a show for Krebber at Fettstrasse 7a, an exhibition space in Hamburg that he programmed together with Kippenberger.[65] After this exhibition did not generate the interest from Max Hetzler that Krebber had hoped for, he felt he had no option but to do longterm work for another artist.[66] In October, he approached Kippenberger and Hubert Kiecol, whose works he

admired. He ended up working only for Kippenberger, however, because Kiecol needed a trained craftsman and Krebber was unskilled.[67] From his encounters with Kippenberger in previous years, he knew that his new position would be "strenuous and at times even unpleasant," as he later put it.[68] But precisely because of its difficulties, this job would turn out to be transformative for both artists. Together they created a novel production method based precisely on the "staging" of "failure" that Oehlen had described.[69] Approaching failure as an engine for artistic production rather than an inhibitor of it, Kippenberger served as a "catalyst" – in the words of the artist Merlin Carpenter, his next assistant – "to get Krebber active."[70] "For the first time in art," Krebber recalled, "I had not tripped myself up and put myself out of commission."[71]

Kippenberger, in the second half of the 1980s, was at a turning point in his own practice. After his 1986 retrospective *Miete Strom Gas* (Rent Electricity Gas) at the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt, which memorialized his years with the Hetzler group, Kippenberger functioned increasingly as what Krebber called a "lone warrior."[72] Instead of collaborating with his peers, as he had done with Oehlen in the mid-1980s, this "lone warrior" now worked only with employees.[73] Reviving a model that he had tested with his 1981 exhibition *Lieber Maler, male mir* (Dear Painter, Paint for Me), in which all of the exhibited works were created by a professional signpainter, Kippenberger delegated the fabrication of his work (and, in some cases, even its conception) to a string of assistants, starting with Krebber.[74]

This expanded production model derives historically from Minimalism; indeed, much of the work that Krebber made for Kippenberger resembles Minimalist sculptures. The first project for Kippenberger was to fabricate an edition of multiples, each copy of which consisted of a bronze broom handle inserted into, or leaned on, a unique container or support structure, ranging from Donald Judd-style boxes to a crib. All fourteen copies of the edition were shown in the 1986 exhibition *Anlehnungsbedürfnis* (Need For Support) at Galerie Christoph Dürr in Munich.[75] Parodying artists like Beuys who leaned objects against the wall, the programmatic title of the exhibition refers to the broomsticks that are in need of supports to stand upright. At the same time, however, Kippenberger directed this parody at himself, inasmuch as he now needed support from assistants like Krebber.[76]

Whereas Minimalist artists depended on the ability of assistants and specialized fabricators to execute their commands flawlessly, Kippenberger capitalized on Krebber's lack of training. Krebber was prone to making mistakes, a situation that Kippenberger exacerbated by pushing the limits of his extremely limited capabilities. To start the *Anlehnungsbedürfnis* project, Kippenberger presented Krebber with a construction drawing in the style of Judd that showed all the different iterations of the series that he envisioned. The boxes, Kippenberger specified, were to be constructed out of sheets of particle board. Because the sheets were so prone to breaking, Krebber had difficulty cutting them into the correct shapes. "It fails again every day," he wrote in a note to himself.[77]

As he recounted in a 1987 interview, Krebber began his work on the *Anlehnungsbedürfnis* edition by making three boxes.[78] The first of these, in his estimation, turned out badly; the second was passable; and the third was excellent. Left to his own devices, Krebber would have simply discarded the first two. But because Kippenberger was more economical with materials, he suggested roughly cutting the first box into three parts. The result was *We Love Frauenknast* (We Love the Women's Prison, 1986), a stack of three boxes with a bronze broomstick leaning against them.[79] By taking Krebber's already-ruined work and ruining it again, Kippenberger initiated a model that he would pursue with all his subsequent assistants. This model is based on what Diederichsen, at the time, called "corrections through double negatives": rather than correcting an error, Kippenberger repeated it, thereby generating what the critic called a "second order error."[80] Diederichsen's prime example of this strategy is a statement by the jazz musician Thelonius Monk.[81] "If you make a mistake, play it loud," said Monk. "Then play it again. That way people will think you did it on purpose."[82]

After completing the *Anlehnungsbedürfnis* edition, Krebber produced dozens of sculptures for Kippenberger's exhibitions in the fall of 1987. The first of these was *Peter: Die russische Stellung* (Peter: The Russian Position) at Galerie Max Hetzler in Cologne. One of the sculptures in *Peter: Die russische Stellung*, titled *As Time Goes By (Belle Epoque)* (1987), is a comically enlarged version of a matchbox that Kippenberger and Krebber found during a trip to Tenerife in the Canary Islands.[83] The original matchbox read "Belle Epoque" in art nouveau-style letters, framed on the top and bottom by vegetal motifs typical of this period. After transferring this design to the top of a Minimalist-style wooden box, Krebber began to fill the outlined letters with black paint. But because of his lack of skill, the paint bled out from the edges of the letters. In response, Kippenberger suggested that he cover the edges in white paint. After beginning to overpaint the edges of the "B" in "Belle

Epoque," Krebber quickly stopped himself. As soon as one error (the half-complete overpainting) had been superimposed over another (the badly painted black letters), the work, he decided, was perfect.[84]

Such a transformation of first-order errors into second-order ones also plays out in several *Peter* sculptures that relate to objects Krebber had made in his youth but subsequently discarded. In one of these, *Indiscret* (1987), he repurposed three paintings he made when he was sixteen as seat bottoms for a type of settee known as an "indiscret."[85] In another, *Wittgenstein* (1987), he reconstructed a cupboard that he had made as a student in Karlsruhe, inspired by the house that Ludwig Wittgenstein designed for his sister in 1926.[86] Diederichsen describes *Wittgenstein* as "the ideal shelves that the assistant had built for himself in his youth and which he single-handedly rebuilt with all the elements that can be pubescent in shelves."[87] Because the young Krebber used particle board that was too thin, the shelves immediately bowed. This problem was compounded by his decision to make the back of the cupboard out of two boards clumsily joined together with screws. In Krebber's remake, all this "existing faultiness," as Diederichsen put it, was scrupulously "reconstructed" – and thereby redeemed.[88]

When he took on Krebber as his employee, Kippenberger submitted him to a hazing ritual similar to the one documented in the *Aktion Pisskrücke* photographs. Indeed, two years before they started working together, Kippenberger asked Krebber for a photocopy of the photograph from *Aktion Pisskrücke* in which Krebber's head appears to be going down a drain (cat. no. 239). Like all hazings, theirs had an erotic aspect: the artist Andrea Fraser has described Kippenberger's behavior as a "highly ritualized sadomasochistic enactment."[89] "To be able to take it," as Koether had written, was thus also meant sexually.[90] As the phallic screwdriver on the invitation card for *Peter* suggests, the exhibition's subtitle is a double-entendre: the word *Stellung* can refer to a sexual position as well as a spatial one (see p. 524). The word *Anlehnungsbedürfnis* contains a similar joke: in each copy of the edition, a phallic stick engages with a receptacle-like support. One of these is titled *Penis*; in another, *A. E.*, the stick is inside an upright box with a hole in its middle.[91] In the poster for Kippenberger's 1987 exhibition *Fräulein Fischer* (Miss Fischer), the pen motif from the *Peter* card reappears above two photographs of Krebber's hands, implying that his assistant was "Miss Fischer."[92]

Kippenberger differed from Förg, and earlier "situation leaders" like Hentz, inasmuch as he theatricalized such humiliation rather than merely practiced it.[93] Reflecting on this moment, Krebber compared his experience working for Kippenberger to his theatrical training with the Rodziankos.[94] In his large-scale installation *The Happy End of Franz Kafka's 'Amerika'* (1994), Kippenberger himself pursued a similar analogy. Presenting his enterprise as a contemporary adaptation of the Nature Theater of Oklahoma at the end of Kafka's novel, Kippenberger's installation includes sculptures fabricated by many different assistants, including Krebber.[95] Like the owner of the Nature Theater, Kippenberger offered a job to everyone, regardless of their skills or lack thereof: "Our Theater can find employment for everyone, a place for everyone!" wrote Kafka.[96] In much the same way that the Rodziankos created their plays by collaging together their students' improvisations, Kippenberger, beginning in the late 1980s, compiled his work out of material generated by his assistants.[97] While these individual contributions, in many cases, did not work, Kippenberger – like the Rodziankos – combined them in a way that did. By framing reality as slapstick, Kippenberger kept his machine running by providing a theatrical space for others to fail. But since this failure was presented to the public under someone else's name, assistants like Krebber did not have to, in his words, "take responsibility."[98] Every failure, in Kippenberger's travesty of redemption, had a "happy end."

Krebber regretted that he had not encountered a teacher in his youth who was able to see his lack of ability as "something good."[99] Years later, Kippenberger became this teacher for him. Krebber's continued identification with the figure of the schoolboy is evident in *Worktimer* (1987), a sculpture from the *Peter* exhibition that contains two student-style briefcases similar to the one he carried while working for Kippenberger. In their roleplay scenario, Krebber played the bad student who could not do his work properly, and Kippenberger the bad teacher who rewarded him for his failures. Another work, *Aufnahmeprüfung in rot* (Entrance Exam in Red, 1987), exemplifies this dynamic. Since the sculpture is predominantly yellow rather than red, the schoolboy who submitted it will presumably fail the titular entrance exam.[100] Yet the fact that the sculpture was on display in the *Peter* exhibition suggests that it met with the teacher's approval. Only such a perversion of pedagogy – pursued, as it were, on stage – could undo the very real "problem of education" that Lüpertz and Polke had created for Krebber.[101] Once failure became success, and pain pleasure, Krebber could experience what he called "joy at strange disasters."[102]

3. Maturity (Puberty in Painting)

At the turn of the 1990s, Krebber suddenly began to work as a painter in a way that he never had before. He held regular solo exhibitions; he was represented by a prominent gallery (Galerie Christian Nagel, founded in Cologne in 1990); and he participated in major institutional exhibitions. Krebber made this development possible by applying the model that he had developed with Kippenberger to his own practice. Combining a theatrical approach to artistic production with the idea of making new works that were reconstructions of (failed) youthful ones, Krebber, during this period, established the foundation for what he would later call the practice of "puberty in painting."[103]

In July 1990, Krebber showed his first painting since the Fettstrasse 7a exhibition four years earlier (cat. no. 2). Made in 1978 when he was Baselitz's assistant, the canvas had been stored, unstretched, in the basement of Krebber's family house for over a decade. On the occasion of an early group exhibition at Galerie Christian Nagel, Krebber exhibited it publicly for the first time.[104] He returned to painting by restaging his initial passage into becoming a painter: he considered the 1978 canvas, at the time, to be his second truly accomplished work. (The first, a painting of a candle he made the year before, had been destroyed; see cat. nos. 2 and 81.) His painting practice of the 1990s thus did not begin with a new work, but with a repetition. In the 1990 exhibition, Krebber did not exhibit the painting itself so much as the delay between the moment of its production and the moment of its exhibition – a temporal gap that he would describe as a "spacer."[105]

In so doing, he performed a gesture similar to that of *Wittgenstein* and *Indiscret*. Krebber alluded to this connection with the title he devised for the group exhibition where the canvas was shown: *Wenn etwas nicht gerade erste Klasse ist, sondern es gibt manchmal auch zweite Qualität, was es ja natürlich auch immer geben muss* (If Something Is Not Exactly First Class, Nevertheless It Often Has a Second Quality, To Which One Must Of Course Always Pay Attention).[106] As his title suggests, Krebber's contribution was not to be seen as "first class"; indeed, at this time, he considered it a failure. Krebber's aspiration to paint like Baselitz is reminiscent of his ambition, as a student, to rival Wittgenstein. By re-presenting these earlier failed efforts at a later date, Krebber shifted attention away from their inability to be "first class" toward what he called their "second quality." This "second quality" – which he associated with the quality particular to the second-rate – had only become visible to him in retrospect.

In the years that followed, Krebber's career as a painter "ran along a copied track," as he put it, of his youthful attempts to become an artist.[107] In February 1991, he held his first exhibition of new paintings since 1986, *biche dans un sous-bois* (doe in the underbrush) at the Zurich location of Fettstrasse 7a.[108] The first painting in this series, cat. no. 3, picked up where the 1978 painting had left off.[109] The silhouette of the figure in cat. no. 2 returns in the form of a still-life: the head in the former painting has the same shape as the porcelain pot in the latter. The brushstrokes around this container, similarly, resemble those around the figure in cat. no. 2. On a "copied track," Krebber performed the awkwardness of his student efforts: if he had emulated Baselitz's technique in the 1978 work, now he emulated this emulation.[110] In a 1991 interview, Krebber remarked that "the things I'm doing now, and doing in public, are things I could just as well have done at the academy."[111] Indeed, the six modestly sized still life and figure studies in *biche dans un sous-bois* resemble traditional academic exercises. Rather than keeping such student work private, Krebber presented what he called "rehearsals" as a public performance.[112] The brushwork in cat. no. 3 has particularly skittish quality, as if painted by a "doe" frightened by her premature appearance on stage – except that this stage fright was now, at least in part, staged.

Although it emerged out of his work for Kippenberger, Krebber's model of "puberty in painting" moved beyond the paradigm established by the Hetzler group.[113] Reflecting on his early years with Galerie Christian Nagel, Krebber, who described himself "as a fan of the program and artists of the Galerie Hetzler," wrote "I had found a place where I could do something that the ones I found so great could not."[114] While Kippenberger had moved "from puberty to success," Krebber's arrival as an artist, on the contrary, was founded on theatrically forestalling this transition.[115] Rather than approaching painting as a "solution to primary post-pubertarian or adolescent problems" – as artists like Kippenberger and Oehlen did, according to Diederichsen – Krebber used it to suspend them.[116] His failed or belated attempts at initiation into the Hetzler group are evidence of this fact. By showing the 1978 painting at the precise moment when he started painting again, Krebber embarked on his career by staging his previous failure to start a career – and, by extension, to exit puberty at the proper moment. He entered maturity, in other words, by presenting his own delayed maturation. Incorporating delay into the mise-en-scène of his own work, Krebber used the practice of "puberty in painting"

to both defer and reiterate the moment of crossing a developmental threshold.[117]

"Puberty in painting" takes place within what Krebber, in a 2005 essay of the same name, called a "stage situation."[118] Indeed, when he began to paint again, Krebber often compared his canvases to props in theatrical productions. The title *biche dans un sous-bois* derives from a vaudeville show he had seen, in which these words were written on a stage wall enclosed within an empty gold picture frame. With their small formats and generic subject matter, the paintings in Krebber's exhibition were like props for the "doe" to use in her performance (see cat. no. 3). In a 1991 group exhibition at the Kunstraum Daxer in Munich, Krebber hung two paintings (cat. nos. 11 and 12) above a sculpture based on a theater prop by Cosima von Bonin (see p. 541).[119] Titled *Plastik und Reis* (Plastic and Rice, 1991), von Bonin's sculpture is a reconstruction of a prop that the Rodziankos had built for their play of the same name. It consists of the silhouette of a young female horse, comparable to Krebber's doe, peeking out from behind two cardboard rectangles that resemble stall doors in a stable. Like many of the context artists who showed with Nagel at this time, von Bonin represented the social environment of the gallery as a theater, with the artists as performers.[120] On the occasion of the Kunstraum Daxer exhibition, for example, she debuted her film *Die fröhliche Wallfahrt* (The Merry Pilgrimage), in which several members of Nagel's stable, including Krebber, performed in a parody of a Bavarian peasant play.[121]

An exhibition from two years earlier – while Krebber was still working in the idiom of context art prefigures the notion of painting as a prop (see cat. no. 290). For his 1989 exhibition at Galerie Isabella Kacprzak in Stuttgart, Krebber had the idea, inspired by the American artist Allan McCollum's series of plaster "surrogates," to show monochrome dummy paintings instead of actual works (cat. no. 291). However, he did not produce these dummies at the time, but asked Gabriel, a retoucher, to add them photomechanically into a view of an empty exhibition space. Only in the next phase of his work would these dummy paintings materialize into actual space: for his 1991 exhibition at the Chicago Art Exposition, Krebber filled Nagel's fair booth with monochrome canvases that resemble the ones in the photograph (see cat. nos. 15–24; p. 543).[122] Krebber conceived his booth as a homage to Jacques Tati's film *Trafic* (1971), in which a model camping car arrives too late to a trade fair. In this analogy, Krebber's paintings would be akin to the model car.

In a review of the Kunstraum Daxer exhibition, the critic Isabelle Graw wrote that "Krebber's paintings represented the presence of paintings."[123] For a painting to "represent the presence of paintings," it must be simultaneously a painting and a surrogate for painting.[124] Contradictions like these are integral to Krebber's concept of "puberty in painting": by the early 1990s, painting was only feasible, for him, in such a "contradictory" form.[125] He pursued his painterly practice within a similarly contradictory "situation": Nagel's gallery showed painters alongside 'context artists' who considered the medium to be inherently reactionary.[126] At a historical moment he recognized as largely "disadvantageous" to the tradition of painting, Krebber re-enacted, by means of surrogates, his youthful aspirations to become what he called a "conservative painter."[127] A studio photograph by Andrea Stappert of the artist at work, posing in front of a canvas as Lüpertz or Baselitz might have done twenty years earlier, appeared in a 1992 article on Krebber and von Bonin with a caption reading "I am a conservative painter" (see cat. no. 25).[128] But the mere fact that Krebber felt the need to make this statement is proof that he was not a "conservative painter," but an actor playing this role.[129]

From 1992 to 1994, Krebber cycled through his repertory of early Michael Werner models, devoting monographic exhibitions to each of them. From Baselitz (1992) to Lüpertz (1993) to Polke (1994), these exhibitions replayed his attempts to emulate these masters as a simulation – in reverse chronological order. In the first, *Michael Krebber: Zeichnungen* (Michael Krebber: Drawings) at Galerie Gisela Capitain in Cologne in 1992, Krebber filled an entire wall of the gallery with twenty-two ink and watercolor works in the manner of Baselitz (see cat. nos. 372–393; p. 549).[130] Painted in a thin, mechanical style, the works are derived, in part, from a catalogue of Baselitz drawings published several years earlier by Galerie Thomas Borgmann, another gallery that had influenced him in his youth.[131] On the occasion of his 1993 solo exhibition at Galerie Christian Nagel, Krebber performed a similar operation on the work of Lüpertz.[132] Four of the works in this exhibition (cat. nos. 51–54) are derived from a drawing of a night sky that Krebber made in 1977 shortly after leaving Lüpertz's class (cat. no. 231).[133] Painted in distemper, a medium favored by Lüpertz in the early 1960s, Krebber's paintings, with their glowing blues and yellows, imitated the palette of his former teacher's work.[134]

In his 1994 exhibition at Marc Jancou Gallery in London, Krebber showed copies of Polke in a similar

mode (cat. nos. 81–94).[135] The template for the series is *Kleine Landschaft mit Rautenhimmel* (Small Landscape with Diamond Sky), a 1969 painting by Polke owned by Heubach, which Krebber saw for the first time in the early 1970s in the apartment that he shared with Annette Bierbach (see cat. no. 81).[136] With these paintings, Krebber, like an actor or musician, attempted to embody a set of techniques integral to Polke's practice.[137] In an accompanying text, he described this activity as an "attempt at reanimation," in reference to Polke's 1967 sculpture *Wiederbelebungsversuch an Bambusstangen* (Attempt at Reanimation of Bamboo Sticks).[138] In this sculpture, the artist staged an attempt to reanimate a bundle of dead bamboo sticks by submerging their tips in a bucket of water. He set up his "experiment" – his *Versuch* – as a contradiction: he knew the sticks would never sprout, yet he kept them in water all the same.[139]

With all three exhibitions, Krebber attempted to revive a model that he had seen as unattainably "first class" in his youth. "I do not believe," continued Krebber, "that I can invent something new in art or painting because whatever I would want to invent already exists."[140] His only option was to stage, in a new way, the impossibility of inventing something new. "As a solution," wrote Krebber, "I have chosen therefore not to cease researching."[141] Treating Polke's work in the same way that Polke had treated these sticks, Krebber doubled his predecessor's experiment. Staging a failed attempt at a failed attempt, Krebber's "research" repeated the act of searching itself.[142] In an essay written for Krebber's first retrospective, Heubach described him as an "inverse Picasso" whose guiding principle is "I do not find, I seek" rather than "I do not seek, I find."[143] If Polke, with his sticks, had sought but not found, Krebber's re-search makes the searching into the finding.

Krebber ended his text by stating that he did "not see a great difference between the terms 'composing' and 'interpreting.'"[144] The conflation of these terms recalls the technique of method acting that he had studied in Berlin, where an actor attempts to become the subject of their performance. If there were indeed no difference between "composing" and "interpreting," the painter and the actor who plays the painter would be one and the same.[145] While they refer to the paradigm of the student copying the teacher, Krebber's copies thus go one step further: he actually wanted to become the artists he admired. In "Puberty in Painting," Krebber referred to such authority figures as "ghosts": to paint as if he were one of them was to be possessed by them.[146] In the restaging, however, the possessor and the possessed are conflated: he re-enacted his own possession in order to possess the ghosts themselves. Programming others by pretending to be programmed by them, Krebber creates situations in which it is impossible to tell who is writing the script and who is performing it.

4. The Living Wedge

Reflecting on his past three decades of work, Krebber titled his 2016–2017 survey exhibition, at the Fundação de Serralves and the Kunsthalle Bern, *The Living Wedge*.[147] The motif of the wedge appears throughout the works in this catalogue, first as a sword in his paintings from 1991 and then as an abstracted triangular shape in the years that followed.[148] Krebber's title, however, derives from a more recent anecdote: shortly after moving to New York in 2016, a group of friends visited him on his roof deck. Because the door to the deck locked automatically, Krebber volunteered to serve as a "living wedge," inserting himself in between the door and the frame so that his friends would not be trapped outside.[149]

Krebber's wedging operation is a fundamental metaphor for his practice. The wedge obstructs the door, whose purpose is to distinguish between the inside and outside of a structure. The Hetzler artists, with their slogan of "Painting is Electing," took aesthetic and social distinctions to be central: "decisiveness," they wrote, is "the task of art."[150] By inserting a wedge into this framework, Krebber also introduced a spacer into his historical relationship to the dominant paradigms in Germany during the 1980s: although he belongs to the same generation as Kippenberger and Oehlen, his career, which only began in the 1990s, is out of step with theirs.[151] Rather than use his art to define social boundaries, or to reflect its historical moment, Krebber cultivated a practice that displaces or exceeds both of these conditions. His work's delayed impact, which would only fully register in the decades to come, is integral to its conception.

The structural difference between Krebber and the Hetzler artists plays out in the form, content, and material of their respective work. The hard boundaries of the Hetzler group are reflected, for example, in the hardness of the paintings they produced. "We mix colors with cement," wrote the authors of *Wahrheit ist Arbeit*, "so that people find our paintings harder."[152] This material hardness corresponds to the hardness of the architectural structures that populate their work. Oehlen's paintings from 1982 to 1985 are

filled with images of bunkers, barbed-wire fences, and brick walls.[153] In one such painting, *Galerie Max Hetzler* (1983), he rendered his own gallery as a military-style building, reminiscent of a blockhouse, made of thick cinder-blocks – presumably to keep enemies out.[154]

Krebber, on the other hand, tends to depict spaces with porous boundaries or no boundaries at all. The first painting in the 1994 London series, cat. no. 81, depicts a body of water whose edges are undefined. It is a space of passage, a liminal space that, as Eichwald has suggested, viewers "can walk through, without knowing where to."[155] Such passages, common in Krebber's work, are figures for puberty itself. If hard boundaries connote decisiveness, liminality connotes indecisiveness: Krebber's brushstrokes, in this work and in general, are light and hesitant as opposed to heavy and conclusive. Not hardened into an impasto crust, his paint, like the watery expanse it depicts, has the fluid, mutable character of watercolor. Krebber's forms and materials are thus still in transition, still in the process of maturing. "Puberty in painting" is still wet.[156]

Central to the concept of "puberty in painting" is what Krebber called "contradictory behavior," a contradition that his paintings instantiate in their formal language.[157] On the left side of cat. no. 81, for example, Krebber placed two pairs of wedge-like shapes. As "spacers," these wedges, which reappear in a number of works in the series, seem to pull open the space behind them.[158] But they also appear to sit flat on the surface of the canvas, holding the viewer back from accessing the very the pictorial field that they retract.[159] Krebber constructed the space behind these wedges in a similarly contradictory fashion.[160] His attempts at perspective are deliberately nonsensical: the green ripples in the water recede only halfway to the horizon line, at which point they grow larger again. A line at the center of cat. no. 85, to give another example, moves backwards into depth while remaining suspended on the picture plane.[161] The London paintings depict a space that is not a space: they are at once expansive and shallow, held open and sealed shut.

This spatial indeterminacy corresponds to a temporal one. As part of their program of "decisiveness," Büttner, Herold, and Oehlen advocated for an art that "seizes the moment."[162] Krebber, in contrast, insists on prematurity and belatedness. Many critics have remarked that his paintings often seem unfinished, as though he had started them too late before an exhibition deadline.[163] If deferral, in such cases, results in a premature product, a premature product can also be shown belatedly: the 1978 painting exhibited in 1990 is perhaps the clearest instance of this tendency. Or, conversely, a late-career activity can be staged prematurely. Krebber's belated debut was followed by a premature retrospective: just months after *biche dans un sous-bois*, he held an overview of his works on paper from the past five years with the official-sounding title *Arbeiten auf Papier, 1986–1991* (Works on Paper, 1986–1991).[164] Krebber perpetually confronts the viewer with temporal contradiction, whether in the form of belated prematurity or premature belatedness.

What he depicts in his paintings, Krebber also creates in real life. As a living wedge, he strives to maintain a space and time of indeterminacy for himself and for others. This space and time is at once the consequence of his painting and its precondition. It is a "stage situation" in which puberty can be endlessly replayed.[165] In it, hierarchy is suspended: so long as the wedge remains in place, no position (in or out, above or below, before or after) is, to return once more to the words of *Wahrheit ist Arbeit*, "conclusively decidable."[166] The wedge does not abolish hierarchy as much as hold it in abeyance. Krebber derives his authority from deferring the exercise of an already-disempowered authority. Far from diminishing painting, such latency intensifies its hold.

1 Michael Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," in Sylvie Liska, ed., *The Secession Talks: Exhibitions in Conversation, 1998–2010* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2011), p. 401.

2 Ibid.

3 Michaela Eichwald, "Tourist-Hochtourist-Junior: Wat willte witten vom Michael Krebber," in Eichwald, *Gewärtigen gegenwärtigen, 10 Jahre sind kein Tag, Fettsau: Ausgewählte Beiträge 1989–1999* (Berlin/Cologne: b_books / Galerie Daniel Buchholz, 2000), p. 40. This text was originally written in 1994 for Krebber's solo exhibition at Bruno Brunnet Fine Arts in Berlin (see cat. no. 95).

4 Michael Krebber, "My Monument of Repetition: Das Abarbeiten an Vorbildern," in Sabeth Buchmann et al., eds., *Wenn sonst nichts klappt: Wiederholung wiederholen in Kunst, Popkultur, Film, Musik, Alltag, Theorie und Praxis* (Berlin: b_books and materialverlag, 2005), pp. 201–203. Krebber integrated this text into "On Puberty in Painting." The dual meaning of "repetition," for Krebber, likely comes from the French word *répétition*, which means both "repetition" and "rehearsal."

5 This concept is central to Oswald Wiener's essay "Eine Art Einzige," which Krebber read upon its publication in 1982. See Wiener, "Eine Art Einzige," in Verena van der Hyden-Rynsch, ed., *Riten der Selbstauflösung* (Munich: Matthes und Seitz, 1982), p. 78. This text was translated into English by Gerrit Jackson and Jakob Schillinger under the title "An Ego of Her Own" in *October* 170 (Fall 2019), pp. 69–94.

6 Krebber first proposed the notion of "puberty in painting" in a lecture at the Universität Köln in 2003. The lecture was transcribed as the introduction to the catalogue for an exhibition that he curated at the Portikus in Frankfurt in 2007. See Krebber, "Editor's Introduction," in Krebber, ed., *Ical Krbbr Prodly Prsnts Gart Jas, Jon Klsy, Josf Stra* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2007), pp. 28–46. He returned to this concept several times. See Michael Krebber, "Puberty in Painting," in Krebber, *Ausserirdische Zwitterwesen / Alien Hybrid Creatures* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2005), pp. 8–9; Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," pp. 395–405.

7 Diedrich Diederichsen, "My Material is the Parrot: A Conversation with Michael Krebber," in Michael Krebber, *Artist-Painter* (Graz: Edition Forum Stadtpark, 1991), p. 12. As the artist put it in another interview, "I was very late at starting to make art" (Thomas Wulffen, "Krebber's Punch and Judy Show," *Flash Art* 160 [October 1991], p. 103).

8 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 395.

9 See Michael Krebber, "Porträt von Hans Salentin als meinem Kunstlehrer," in Michael Euler-Schmidt, ed. *Hans Salentin: Festschrift zum 75. Geburtstag.* Cologne: Kölnisches Stadtmuseum, 2000, pp. 34–35.

10 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 400.

11 Ibid., p. 396. He showed similar devotion to the Art Deco antique shop owned by Jule Lüpertz.

12 Sigmar Polke, *Sigmar Polke*, Galerie Thomas Borgmann, Cologne, November – December 1970. See Ingeborg Wiensowski, "Michael Krebber," *Kultur Spiegel* (March 2001), p. 26.

13 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 396.

14 Michael Krebber, communication with the author, February 2022.

15 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 400.

16 Krebber was introduced to Heubach by the art historian Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and the anthropologist Michael Oppitz. Around this time, Oppitz told Krebber an anecdote from his childhood that left a strong impression on him. While Oppitz was waiting at a red light with his older brother, a bicyclist raced by, his shirt inflated by the wind. His brother called the bicyclist a show-off. Oppitz decided he wanted to be a show-off too and put sticks under his shirt to hold it at a distance from his back.

17 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 400.

18 Dieter Roth, "cogito ergo dumm," *Die Schastrommel* 6 (April 1972), pp. [3–8]. In German, *dumm* means "dumb."

19 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 400.

20 As Baselitz's assistant, Krebber did gardening work, took care of his animals, and printed many of his large-scale woodcuts.

21 This imitative behavior extended beyond the realm of art: for example, Krebber purchased the same Hutschenreuther porcelain and a similar Mercedes as Baselitz. See cat. nos. 57 and 300.

22 Georg Baselitz, "Über Michael Krebber," unpublished manuscript, dated October 9, 2018.

23 Chargesheimer is particularly known for his book *Unter Krahnenbäumen* (Cologne: Greven Verlag, 1958).

24 Wolfgang Becker, "Les Nouveaux Fauves / Die Neuen Wilden: Vorschlag zu einer Untersuchung" (1980), in Benjamin Dodenhoff and Ramona Heinlein, eds., *Die Erfindung der Neuen Wilden: Malerei und Subkultur um 1980 / The Invention of the Neue Wilde: Painting and Subculture around 1980* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2019), pp. 374–375.

25 See Michael Krebber and Loriot Lottmann, "Loriot Lottmann: Frage, Michael Krebber: Antwort," in Martin Kippenberger, *Peter 2* (Vienna: Galerie Peter Pakesch, 1987), p. [4].

26 Albert Oehlen, "Michael Krebber: Zäsur in der Biographie eines Kritiksüchtigen," *Szene Hamburg* (February 1986), p. 96.

27 Krebber and Lottmann, "Loriot Lottmann: Frage, Michael Krebber: Antwort," p. [3]. See Diedrich Diederichsen, "Fantasie fanden wir scheisse / Fantasy was shit," in Dodenhoff and Heinlein, eds., p. 260.

28 Werner Büttner, Georg Herold, and Albert Oehlen, "Facharbeiterficken," in *Über sieben Brücken musst Du gehen* (Stuttgart: Max-Ulrich Hetzler, 1982), pp. [44–45].

29 Ibid, p. [45]. See also Wilfried Dickhoff, ed., *Albert Oehlen im Gespräch mit Wilfried Dickhoff und Martin Prinzhorn* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1991), p. 59.

30 Martin Kippenberger, *Durch die Pubertät zum Erfolg* (Berlin: Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst, 1981).

31 Werner Büttner, Albert Oehlen, and Martin Kippenberger, *Wahrheit ist Arbeit* (Essen: Museum Folkwang, 1984), p. 14. See also Diedrich Diederichsen, "Virtueller Maoismus: Das Wissen von 1984," in Helmut Draxler et al., eds., *Malen ist Wahlen: Büttner, Kippenberger, Oehlen* (Munich: Kunstverein München, 1992), p. 32.

32 Diederichsen, "Virtueller Maoismus," pp. 31–32.

33 On the work of Hentz and Minus Delta t, see Mike A. Hentz, *Works* (Hamburg: Buch Handlung Welt, 1980).

34 Mike Hentz, communication with the author, February 2022.

35 Michael Krebber, communication with the author, September 2019; Hentz, communication with the author, February 2022.

36 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 400.

37 Ibid.

38 See Lee Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion: The Development of a Method* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1987); Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012).

39 Vladimir Rodzianko and Cornelia Hirschfeld, "Theater-Theater," in Fried Weisbrod and Jörg Lehmann, eds., *Musik in der Grundschule* (Berlin: Pädagogisches Zentrum, 1984), p. 13. See also Ulrike Pfeiffer, Bärbel Freund, and Ute Aurand, *Filme* (Berlin: Kino Arsenal and Filmkunsthaus Babylon, 2004), p. 22.

40 Ibid., p. 7.

41 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 401. In an attempt to bring him back to the practice of painting, Vladimir Rodzianko taught Krebber about the French filmmaker Jacques Tati, the Georgian-American choreographer George Balanchine, Russian icon painting, and Der Blaue Reiter as opposed to Die Brücke.

42 Bärbel Freund, communication with the author, June 2018. See Michael Krebber, "Angeldust," *Durch* 3–4 (1987), p. 111.

43 Oehlen, "Michael Krebber: Zäsur in der Biographie eines Kritiksüchtigen," p. 96.

44 Ibid.

45 Diederichsen, "My Material is the Parrot," p. 13.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid. In a 1991 interview with Jutta Koether, Kippenberger would say that Krebber was "an artwork by himself, without doing anything, without creating objects" (Koether, "One has to be able to take it!: Interview with Martin Kippenberger, November, 1990 – May, 1991" in Ann Goldstein, ed., *Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective* [New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009], p. 317). On a related development, see Josef Strau, "The Non-productive Attitude," in Bennett Simpson, ed., *Make Your Own Life: Artists In & Out of Cologne* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2006), pp. 28–31.

48 Georg Herold, Hubert Kiecol, and Uwe and Ingeborg Gabriel were also living in Cologne by this time.

49 Diederichsen, "Virtueller Maoismus," pp. 31–32.

50 Ibid.; Büttner, Herold, and Oehlen, p. [44].

51 Büttner, Kippenberger, Albert Oehlen, p. 6; Dickhoff, ed., p. 92. On p. 134 of *Wahrheit ist Arbeit* is a photograph of Krebber by Büttner. Next to the photograph, the artists placed a drawing by Markus Oehlen of a figure with a large arm pointing in his direction. The act of pointing echoes the dedication of the book.

52 Büttner, Kippenberger, and Oehlen, pp. 28, 31, 40.

53 Ibid., pp. 28, 40.

54 Ibid., p. 31.

55 Koether, p. 310.

56 Werner Büttner, Martin Kippenberger, and Albert Oehlen, *Malen ist Wahlen,* Kunstverein München, July 15 – September 13, 1992. The title and design of the catalogue for *Malen ist Wahlen* refer explicitly to *Wahrheit ist Arbeit.* See Helmut Draxler, "Grundmythos mit Kausalzusammenhang: Materialien zur Historisierung der 'Bande,'" in Draxler et al., eds., p. 7.

57 Michael Krebber, untitled manuscript, c. 1985. The full text reads: "Aufsatz + Handlungsreisen / zu diesen Bildern / im welcher Zeit / Hetzlereröffnung / Test Sätze / gegenüber / Spiegel / Training" (Essay + business trips / to these paintings / at what time / Hetzler opening / Test sentences / in front of / mirror / Training).

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

60 Michael Krebber, untitled manuscript, c. 1985. The full text reads: "empfänglich für Lob / empfänglich / beleidigt sein" (receptive to praise / receptive / being insulted).

61 Ibid.; Michael Krebber, untitled manuscript, c. 1985. The full text reads: "der an seinen Hemmungen verzweifelnde / So Alles an Eröffnungen / Wer ist der Herr im Haus / Wer bestimmt was Kraft ist / Stundenplan / Die Sucht wird ohne Programm unerträglich / beobachte die Sucht nur noch / Homunculus" (the one in despair over his inhibitions / Like all openings / Who is the master in the house here / Who defines power / timetable / Addiction becomes unbearable without a plan / do nothing else with addiction but observe it / Homunculus); Michael Krebber, untitled manuscript, c. 1985. The full text reads: "Aus dem Steggreif / ein Gespräch mit / jedem. + zwar / Situationsführer. / Die Neugeburt / Die Wiedergeburt / Jede Beleidigung / Förg / das endgültige / Niveau" (Off the cuff / a conversation with / each and every. + in this case / the situation leader. / Rebirth / Rebirth / Each insult / Förg / the ultimate / level).

62 Ibid.

63 Michael Krebber, communication with the author, December 2021.

64 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 396.

65 See Ibid., p. 398; Diederichsen, "My Material Is the Parrot," pp. 4, 13.

66 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 401.

67 Krebber and Lottmann, "Loriot Lottmann: Frage, Michael Krebber: Antwort," p. [6].

68 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 401.

69 Oehlen, "Michael Krebber: Zäsur in der Biographie eines Kritiksüchtigen," p. 96.

70 Merlin Carpenter, "The Sound of Bamboo," in Karola Grässlin and Susanne Pfleger, eds., *Michael Krebber: Apothekerman* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2001), p. 30.

71 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 401.

72 Cosima von Bonin and Michael Krebber, "Eine dicke Spinne," *Spex* (May 1997), p. 59.

73 Kippenberger and Oehlen collaborated on a series of paintings in 1983. See Büttner, Kippenberger, and Oehlen, pp. 54, 58.

74 Martin Kippenberger, *Lieber Maler, male mir,* Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst, Berlin, March 6 – April 16, 1981.

75 An image of each copy appeared in Martin Kippenberger, ed., *Anlehnungsbedürfnis 86* (Munich: Galerie Christoph Dürr, 1987). In this book, Krebber published a text titled "Gedicht für einen Besen" (Poem to a Broom), in which he quoted the entirety of the press release that Broodthaers issued on the occasion of his debut as an artist in 1964, at the age of forty. See Michael Krebber, "Gedicht für einen Besen," in Kippenberger, ed., *Anlehnungsbedürfnis 86*, p. 8.

76 On Kippenberger's use of assistants, see Merlin Carpenter, "Back Seat Driver," in Thomas Groetz, ed., *Gitarren, die nicht Gudrun heissen: Homage to Martin Kippenberger* (Berlin: Holzwarth, 2002), pp. 26–30; Diedrich Diederichsen. "The Poor Man's Sports Car Descending a Staircase: Kippenberger as Sculptor," in Ann Goldstein, ed., *Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), pp. 119–156.

77 Michael Krebber, untitled manuscript, c. 1986. The full text reads: "Standort / Ausgangspunkt / :/ erotische Situation /: / Handwerker! / Psychologie / :/ Polizei /: / :/ Zierbengel /: / :/ IQ /: / :/ Zur Frauenfrage /: / :/ Minus delta t /: / :/ Schwachpunkt /: / :/ Revolution /: / :/ Alkoholiker sucht (allgemeine) /: / :/ STABIL / jetzt / schlecht / täglicher Aufbau / Abbau /: / :/ Stabil /: / :/ labil /: / Manzoni Text / Zeichnungen / Verhalten / Plakate / :/ Wenn jeder Tag wieder scheitert /: / WORAN / gefährdet oder gefährlich

(location / starting point / :/ erotic situation /: / craftsman! / psychology / :/ police /: / :/ fop /: / :/ IQ /: / :/ women's issues /: / :/ Minus delta t /: / :/ weak point /: / :/ revolution /: / :/ alcoholic addiction (general) /: / :/ STABLE / now / bad / setting up daily / degradation /: / :/ Stable /: / :/ labile /: / Manzoni text / drawings / behavior / posters / :/ when it fails again every day /: / FROM WHAT / endangered or dangerous). This text dates from the time when Krebber worked for Kippenberger. Many phrases are separated by a ":/" sign, which should not be confused with the "/" sign used here to indicate line breaks.

78 Michael Krebber, communication with the author, September 2019.

79 Kippenberger, ed., *Anlehnungsbedürfnis 86*, p. 15.

80 Diedrich Diederichsen, untitled text, in Martin Kippenberger, *Peter* (Cologne: Galerie Max Hetzler, 1987), p. 8; Diederichsen, "Virtueller Maoismus," p. 36.

81 Diederichsen, "Virtueller Maoismus," p. 36.

82 Ibid.

83 Kippenberger, *Peter*, no. 12.

84 See Michael Krebber and Loriot Lottmann, "Interview-fortsetzung von *Peter 2*. Loriot Lottmann: Frage. Michael Krebber: Antwort" in Martin Kippenberger, *Die Reise nach Jerusalem* (Graz: Galerie Bleich-Rossi, 1987), p. [10].

85 Kippenberger, *Peter*, no. 17.

86 See Bernard Leitner, *The Architecture of Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Documentation / Die Architektur von Ludwig Wittgenstein: Eine Dokumentation* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design, 1973).

87 Diederichsen, untitled text, in Kippenberger, *Peter*, p. 8. The sculpture is plate no. 9 in the catalogue.

88 Ibid.

89 Andrea Fraser, untitled text, in Simpson, ed., p. 44.

90 Koether, p. 310.

91 Kippenberger, ed., *Anlehnungsbedürfnis 86*, pp. 16–17, 30–31.

92 Martin Kippenberger, *Fräulein Fischer*, Galerie Nørballe, Copenhagen, March 3 – April 4, 1987.

93 Michael Krebber, untitled manuscript, c. 1985. See note 61.

94 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 401.

95 Kippenberger integrated *Indiscret* (1987) into his installation. See Martin Kippenberger, *The Happy End of Franz Kafka's 'Amerika'* (Rotterdam: Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, 1994), no. 103. The catalogue also includes reproductions of other *Peter* sculptures: see nos. 48, 74, 86, 89, 92, 111, 112, 113, 121, and 157.

96 Franz Kafka, *Amerika* (New York: Schocken, 1962), p. 294.

97 Rodzianko and Hirschfeld, p. 12.

98 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 401.

99 Ibid., p. 400.

100 See Eva Meyer-Hermann. "Peter-Skulpturen, 1987 / The Peter Sculptures, 1987," in Meyer-Hermann and Susanne Neuburger, eds., *Nach Kippenberger / After Kippenberger* (Vienna: Schlebrügge, 2003), p. 103.

101 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 400.

102 Krebber, "Gedicht für einen Besen," p. 8.

103 Krebber, "Puberty in Painting," pp. 8–9.

104 Krebber repeated this gesture in 2010, when he restored and remounted a painting from his youth titled *Das politische Bild* (1968/2010) for his exhibition *Miami City Ballet* at Galerie Daniel Buchholz in Berlin.

105 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 401.

106 *Wenn etwas nicht gerade erste Klasse ist, sondern es gibt manchmal auch zweite Qualität, was es ja natürlich auch immer geben muss*, Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne, July 13 – August 4, 1990. In addition to Krebber, this exhibition included works by Fareed Armaly, Cosima von Bonin, Christian Philipp Müller, and Joseph Zehrer.

107 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 401.

108 Michael Krebber, *biche dans un sous-bois*, Fettstrasse 7a, Zurich, February 12, 1991 –

109 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 401.

110 Ibid.

111 Wulffen, p. 103.

112 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 400.

113 Krebber, "Puberty in Painting," pp. 8–9.

114 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 402.

115 Kippenberger, *Durch die Pubertät zum Erfolg.*

116 Diederichsen, "Virtueller Maoismus," p. 32.

117 Krebber, "Puberty in Painting," pp. 8–9.

118 Ibid., p. 8.

119 *Eine Ausstellung mit Fareed Armaly, Cosima von Bonin, Michael Krebber, und Christian Philipp Müller*, Kunstraum Daxer, Munich, May 4 – June 22, 1991.

120 On 'context art,' see Peter Weibel, ed., *Kontext Kunst: Kunst der 90er Jahre* (Cologne: DuMont, 1994). As part of a 1991 exhibition at the Kunstraum Daxer in Munich, a replica of the façade of Nagel's gallery was displayed, like a stage set, on the grounds of the home of the collectors Hanns and Louise Daxer. See Karola Grässlin, ed., *Eine Ausstellung mit Fareed Armaly, Cosima von Bonin, Michael Krebber, und Christian Philipp Müller* (Munich: Kunstraum Daxer, 1991).

121 See Diedrich Diederichsen and Jutta Koether, "Über 'Die fröhliche Wallfahrt': Ein Film von Cosima von Bonin / About 'The Merry Pilgrimage': A Film by Cosima von Bonin," in Barbara Engelbach, ed., *Familienbande: Die Schenkung Schröder* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2019), pp. 73, 321.

122 Michael Krebber, *Michael Krebber*, Chicago International Art Exposition, May 9–14, 1991.

123 Isabelle Graw, "Cosima Bonin, Fareed Armaly, Christian Philipp Müller und Michael Krebber im Kunstraum Daxer," *Texte zur Kunst* 4 (Fall 1991), p. 196.

124 Ibid. On the concept of surrogates in Krebber's work, see Magnus Schaefer, "I, a Painter," in Michael Krebber and Alexis Vaillant, eds., *Michael Krebber: Les escargots ridiculisés / The ridiculized snails* (Bordeaux/Dijon: CAPC Musée d'art contemporain / Les presses du réel, 2012), p. 15.

125 Krebber, "Puberty in Painting," p. 9.

126 Ibid. Charline von Heyl, Josef Strau, and Hans-Jörg Mayer exhibited paintings with Nagel in 1991, 1992, and 1993, respectively.

127 Ibid.; Eva Karcher, "Zwei Kölner Avant-Garde Künstler: Mit Ironie statt Ideologie," *PAN (Spezial)* (March 1992), p. 40. On the use of surrogates to restage past models, see Wiener, "Eine Art Einzige," p. 55.

128 Karcher, p. 40. In this photograph, a banana can be seen on the table in front of the artist (see p. 548).

129 Ibid.

130 Michael Krebber, *Zeichnungen*, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne, October 13 – November 21, 1992.

131 [Thomas Borgmann, ed.], *Georg Baselitz: Arbeiten auf Papier, 1961–1968* (Cologne: Galerie Thomas Borgmann, 1985). See p. 549.

132 Michael Krebber, *Michael Krebber*, Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne, July 20 – August 28, 1993.

133 This drawing bears the influence of Krebber's fellow student Martin Bauer. See cat. no. 152, p. 538.

134 See Theo Kneubühler, "Markus Lüpertz," in Johannes Gachnang, ed., *Markus Lüpertz: Dithyrambische und Stil-Malerei* (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1977), pp. 7–10.

135 Michael Krebber, *Michael Krebber*, Marc Jancou Gallery, London, May 26 – June 25, 1994.

136 See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, ed., *Sigmar Polke: Bilder, Tücher, Objekte. Werkauswahl 1962–1971* (Tübingen/Düsseldorf/Eindhoven: Kunsthalle Tübingen / Kunsthalle Düsseldorf / Stedelijk van-Abbe-Museum, 1976), no. 127, p. 158.

137 Michael Krebber, press text for *Michael Krebber*, dated April 1994. Reprinted in Grässlin and Pfleger, eds., p. 70.

138 Ibid. See Buchloh, ed., no. 78, p. 87.

139 Emphasizing the futility of the attempt, Polke placed roof battens in a second bucket of water next to the bamboo sticks.

140 Krebber, press text for *Michael Krebber*, in Grässlin and Pfleger, eds., p. 70.

141 Ibid.

142 Ibid.

143 Friedrich Wolfram Heubach, "Karl Valentin, Michael Krebber, Pablo Picasso," in Bettina Funcke, ed., *Grey Flags* (New York: Sculpture Center, 2006), p. 157. The original German version of the text was published in Grässlin and Pfleger, eds., pp. 64–65. See also Heubach, *Ein Bild und sein Schatten: Zwei randständige Betrachtungen zum Bild der Melancolie und zur Erscheinung der Depression* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1997).

144 Krebber, press text for *Michael Krebber*, in Grässlin and Pfleger, eds., p. 70. Krebber's use of musical vocabulary recalls his early training as a flutist.

145 Ibid.

146 Krebber, "Puberty in Painting," p. 8.

147 Michael Krebber, *The Living Wedge*, Fundação de Serralves, Porto, October 14 – January 15, 2017; Kunsthalle Bern, February 17 – April 30, 2017.

148 See cat. nos. 5, 6, 11, 33, 51, 86 and 87.

149 Manfred Hermes, "The Reverse Sublime, Doubly Inverted," in *Michael Krebber: The Living Wedge, Part II* (London: Koenig Books, 2017), p. 87.

150 Draxler et al., eds.; Büttner, Herold, and Oehlen, p. [45]. See Hermes, p. 88.

151 In his 1991 interview with Koether, Kippenberger remarked that "Krebber will be the hero of the nineties, whether he likes it or not" (Koether, p. 316).

152 Büttner, Kippenberger, and Oehlen, p. 31.

153 Examples include *Atoll* (1983), *Goldener Mann schlägt Schlampe I* (1984), and *Rock 'n' Roll Beerdigung* (1985). See Albert Oehlen, *Das Geld* (Cologne: Galerie Max Hetzler, 1986), p. 10; Oehlen, *Farbenlehre* (Hamburg: Galerie Ascan Crone, 1985), p. 21.

154 Büttner, Kippenberger, and Oehlen, p. 120.

155 Eichwald, p. 39.

156 Krebber, "Puberty in Painting," pp. 8–9.

157 Ibid., p. 9.

158 Krebber, "On Puberty in Painting," p. 401.

159 See Carpenter, "The Sound of Bamboo," p. 31.

160 See Clifford Myerson, "On Painting I," *Art Monthly* 179 (September 1994), p. 15.

161 Ibid., p. 16.

162 Büttner, Herold, and Oehlen, p. [45]. Their entire sentence reads: "Entschiedenheit, und wenn es nur eine für Sekunden ist, ist immer Gebot der Kunst (Stunde)" (Decisiveness, even when it lasts only for a few seconds, is always the task of art [the hour]). The combination of *Kunst* ("art") and *Stunde* (literally "hour") is a pun on the phrase *Gunst der Stunde*, which means "seizing the moment."

163 See David Grubbs, "Bestellt und nicht abgeholt: Michael Krebber in der Greene Naftali Gallery, New York," *Texte zur Kunst* 52 (December 2003), pp. 210–212; John Kelsey, "Stop Painting Painting," in Kelsey, *Rich Texts* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), pp. 192, 195.

164 Michael Krebber, *Arbeiten auf Papier, 1986–1991*, Galerie Bleich-Rossi, Graz, November 7 – December 4, 1991. Designed by Jörg Schlick, this catalogue for this exhibition was conceived as a luxury publication with gilt-edged loose-leaf pages housed in a gilt-lettered clamshell case.

165 Krebber, "Puberty in Painting," p. 8.

166 Büttner, Kippenberger, and Oehlen, p. 28. On this point, see Carpenter, "The Sound of Bamboo," p. 32; Kelsey, p. 196; Isabelle Graw and Michael Krebber, "The Last Resort: Michael Krebber in Conversation with Isabelle Graw," *Kaleidoscope* 20 (Winter 2013), p. 70; Hermes, pp. 88–89.